

at the top, disclosed a round sinewy neck, ruddy and corded like the bark of the fir. Thick muscular arms, covered with a reddish down, protruded from the wide sleeves of his habit, while his white shirt, looped up upon one side, gave a glimpse of a huge knotty leg, scarred and torn with the scratches of brambles. With a howl to the Abbot, which had in it perhaps more pleasantry than reverence, the novice strode across to the carved prie-dieu which had been set apart for him, and stood silent and erect, with his hand upon the gold bell which was used in the private prisons of the Abbot's own household. His dark eyes glanced rapidly over the assembly, and finally settled with a grim and menacing twinkle upon the face of his accuser.

The chamberlain rose, and having slowly unrolled the parchment-scroll, proceeded to read it out in a thick and pompous voice, while a subdued rustle and movement among the brothers bespoke the interest with which they followed the proceedings.

"Charges brought upon the second Thursday after the feast of the Assumption, in the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and sixty-six, against Brother John, formerly known as Hordle John, or John of Hordle, but now a novice in the holy monastic order of the Cistercians. Read upon the same day at the Abbey of Beaulieu in the presence of the most reverend Abbot Berghersh and of the assembled order.

"The charges against the said Brother John are the following, namely, to wit:

"First, that on the above-mentioned feast of the Assumption, small beer having been served to the novices in the proportion of one quart to each four, the said Brother John did drain the pot at one draught, to the detriment of Brother Paul, Brother Porphyry, and Brother Ambrose, who could scarce eat their non-meat of salted stock-fish, on account of their exceeding dryness."

At this solemn indictment the novice raised his hand and twitched his lip, while even the placid senior brothers glanced across at each other and coughed to cover their amusement. The Abbot alone sat gray and immutable, with a drawn face and a brooding eye.

"Item, that having been told by the master of the novices that he should restrict his food for two days to a single three-pound loaf of bran and beans, for the greater honoring and glorifying of St. Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, he was heard by Brother Ambrose and others to say

if your eyes were upon your sandals, how came ye to see this smile of which ye prate? A week in your cells, false brethren, a week of rye bread and lentils, with double Lauds and double Matins, may help ye to a remembrance of the laws under which ye live."

At this sudden out-flame of wrath the two witnesses sank their faces on their chests, and sat as men crushed. The Abbot turned his angry eyes away from them and bent them upon the accused, who met his searching gaze with a firm and composed face.

"What hast thou to say, Brother John, upon these few things which are urged against thee?"

"Little enough, good father, little enough!" said the novice. "For the matter of the ale, I had come in hot from the fields and had scarce got the taste of the thing before mine eye lit upon the bottom of the pot. It may be, too, that I spoke somewhat shortly concerning the bran and the beans, the same being poor provender and unfitted for a man of my inches. It is true also that I did lay my hands upon this jack-fool of a Brother Ambrose, though, as you can see, I did him little scath. As regards the maid, too, it is true that I did heft her over the strim, she having on her hosen and shoon, whilst I had but my wooden sandals, which could take no hurt from the water. I should have thought shame upon my manhood, as well as my monkhood, if I had held back my hand from her." He glanced around as he spoke, with the half-amused look which he had worn during the whole proceedings.

"There is no need to go further," said the Abbot. "He has confessed to all. It only remains for me to portion out the punishment which is due to his evil conduct."

He rose and the two long lines of brothers followed his example, looking sideways with scared faces at the angry prelate.

"John of Hordle," he thundered, "you have shown yourself during the two months of your novitiate to be a recreant monk, and one who is unworthy to wear the white garb which is the outer symbol of the spotless spirit. That dress shall therefore be stripped from thee, and thou shalt be cast into the outer world without benefit of clerkship, and without lot or part in the graces and blessings of those who dwell under the care of the blessed Benedict. Thou shalt come back neither to Beaulieu nor to any of the granges of Beaulieu, and thy name shall be struck off the scrolls of the order."

The sentence appeared a terrible one to the older monks, who had become so used to the safe and regular life of the Abbey that they would have been as helpless as children in the outer world. From their pious oasis they looked drearily out at the desert of life—a place full of stormings and strivings, comfortless, restless, and



WITH A SHOUT HE TORE UP THE HEAVY OAKEN PRIEDIEU.

that he wished twenty thousand devils would fly away with the said Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, or any other saint who came between a man and his meat. Item, that upon Brother Ambrose reproving him for his blasphemous wish, he did hold the said brother face downward over the piscatorium or fish-pond for a space during which the said brother was able to repeat a Pater and four Aves for the better fortifying of his soul against impending death."

There was a buzz and murmur among the white-frocked brethren at this grave charge; but the Abbot held up his long quivering hand. "What then?" said he.

"Item, that between Nones and Vespers on the feast of James the Less the said Brother John was observed upon the Brokenhurst road, near the spot which is known as Hatchett's Pond, in converse with a person of the other sex, being a maiden of the name of Mary Sowley, the daughter of the king's verderer. Item, that after sundry japes and jokes the said Brother John did lift up the said Mary Sowley and did take, carry, and convey her across a stream, to the infinite relish of the devil and the exceeding detriment of his own soul, which scandalous and wilful falling away was witnessed by three members of our order."

A dead silence throughout the room, with a rolling of heads and upturning of eyes, bespoke the pious horror of the community. The Abbot drew his gray brows low over his fiercely questioning eyes.

"Who can vouch for this thing?" he asked.

"That can I," answered the accuser. "So too can Brother Porphyry, who was with me, and Brother Mark of the Spicarium, who hath been so much stirred and inwardly troubled by sight that he now lies in a fever through it."

"And the woman?" asked the Abbot.

"Did she not break into lamentation and woe that a brother should so demean himself?"

"Canst thou?" asked the Abbot, in a high, tempestuous tone. "Canst thou so? Hast forgotten that the five-and-thirtieth rule of the order is that in the presence of a woman the face should be ever averted and the eyes cast down? Hast forgot it, I say?"

overshadowed by evil. The young novice, however, appeared to have other thoughts, for his eyes sparkled, and his smile broadened. It needed but to add fresh fuel to the fiery mood of the prelate.

"So much for thy spiritual punishment!" he cried. "But it is to the grosser feelings that we must turn in such matters as thine, and as thou art no longer under the shield of holy Church there is the less difficulty. Ho, there! lay-brothers—Francis, Nemo, Joseph—seize him and bind his arms! Drag him forth, and let the foresters and the porters scourge him from the precincts!"

As these three brothers advanced toward him to carry out the Abbot's direction the smile faded from the novice's face, like a bull at a baiting. Then, with a sudden deep-chested shout, he tore up the heavy oaken prie-dieu and poised it to strike, taking two steps backward the while, that none might take him at a vantage.

"By the black road of Waltham!" he roared, "if any knave among you lays a finger-end upon the edge of my gown, I will crush his skull like a flint!" With his thick knotted arms, his thundering voice, and his bristle of red hair, there was something so repellent in the man that the three brothers flew back at the very glare of him; and the two rows of white monks strained away from him like poplars in the tempest. The Abbot only sprang forward with shining eyes; but the chancellor and the master hung upon either arm and wrestled him out of danger's way.

"He is possessed of a devil," they shouted. "Run, Brother Ambrose, Brother Joachim! Call Hugh of the Mill, and Woodman Wat, and Raco, with that we are in fear of our lives! Run, run, for the love of the Virgin!"

But the novice was a strategist as well as a man of action. Springing forward, he buried his unwieldy weapon at Brother Ambrose, and as desk and monk clattered on to the floor together, he sprang through the open door and down the winding stair. Sleepy old Brother Athanasius, at the porter's cell, had a flying vision of twinkling feet and flying skirts; but before he had time to rub his eyes the recreant had passed the lodge, and was speeding as fast as his sandals could patter along the Lyndhurst road.

CHAPTER II.

Never had the peaceful atmosphere of the old Cistercian house been so rudely ruffled. Never had there been



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—John James Ingalls.

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